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Chairman: Mr. Galuška ..... (Czech Republic)

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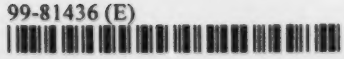

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 106: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (A/54/3, A/54/56, A/54/57, A/54/59, A/54/61 and Corr.1, A/54/62, A/54/66-E/1999/6, A/54/98, A/54/128-E/1999/70, A/54/256, A/54/268 and A/54/388; A/C.3/54/L.2)

1. **Mr. Langmore** (Director, Division for Social Policy and Development) said that the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (A/54/59) highlighted the efforts of Governments, the United Nations system, regional and other intergovernmental bodies, youth non-governmental organizations and others to implement the recommendations of the World Programme of Action. The report also reviewed the outcome of the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, held in Portugal in 1998.

2. Young people's situation and their prospects were closely linked to the general economic and social conditions in their communities, particularly in developing countries, where youth made up a large proportion of the population.

3. Young people also faced special challenges. While all societies had their rites of passage, the customary methods of ensuring the transition from childhood to adulthood were often inadequate to the challenges posed by increasingly complex economies. Public policies must be centred outside the home in order to prepare young people for a productive life and enable social institutions to adapt to the needs of rising generations.

4. The link between current and future generations was clearly reflected in the theme for the International Year of Older Persons, namely, "a society for all ages". The impact of the year was already evident in the expanded role of the United Nations programme on ageing, as described in the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/268). The programme priorities included the continued elaboration of the policy framework for a society for all ages, the further elaboration of the research agenda on ageing for the twenty-first century, and the development of an Internet-accessible database of innovative policy approaches and projects. Plans under way for the years 2000, 2001 and 2002 would promote a shift from a view of societal ageing as a problem to a more positive but still realistic view.

5. While it was a normal life experience to be young and, for more and more people, to be old, to be disabled was different. Disability could happen to anyone at any time and it could take any number of forms. Disability called for specific responses within the broader framework set by the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995) of advancing "a society for all".

6. His Division regretted the late issuance of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (A/54/388) and hoped that the wealth of information it contained would be of value to Member States.

7. One out of every three or four families experienced disability at one time or another, and to the extent that caring for disabled persons was a burden, much of it fell on families.

8. The report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to the International Year of the Family (A/54/256) highlighted the activities of Governments, the United Nation system, and non-governmental and academic institutions. It underscored the need to develop common ground and common understanding among constituencies viewing family issues from different perspectives.

9. Paragraph 8 of the report outlined the major recommendations, namely, improving the knowledge base through research, data collection and collaboration at all levels, building local capacity in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, and giving attention to the most appropriate way of observing the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004 in order to strengthen follow-up.

10. Lastly, the report of the Secretary-General on the status and role of cooperatives (A/54/57) contained the results of the Secretary-General's survey, carried out in cooperation with the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives, on the desirability and feasibility of elaborating United Nations guidelines aimed at creating a supportive environment for the development of cooperatives. In response to the Secretary-General's questionnaire to Governments, replies had been received from 40 governmental agencies in 37 countries. The questionnaire had also been transmitted to national cooperative organizations, 56 of which had replied. The questionnaire had asked whether Governments were willing to participate in and contribute to the elaboration of United Nations guidelines. Among the Governments replying to the question, none had been explicitly unwilling to participate, which his Division took to mean that all supported the idea.

11. **Mr. Legwaila** (Botswana), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said

that the countries concerned remained committed to addressing critical issues of social development, including poverty eradication, the expansion of productive employment, education for all, women's empowerment and social integration. Nevertheless, if any real and sustainable impact was to be made on poverty, sufficient economic growth must be generated to finance the various initiatives outlined in the Copenhagen Programme of Action.

12. Many SADC countries had been unable to achieve such growth, owing mainly to external factors. An average growth rate of from 3 per cent to 3 5 per cent was predicted for the SADC countries in 1999, largely as a result of sound macroeconomic policies. Such growth fell far short, however, of the 6 per cent needed to reduce poverty.

13. Despite the far-reaching and often painful economic reforms undertaken by the SADC countries, foreign direct investment was only beginning to trickle in. Regrettably, official development assistance had declined steadily throughout the years. Those factors had strengthened the resolve of the SADC countries to further mobilize their own human, financial and technical resources for reinvestment in the region.

14. Nevertheless, the region's social transformation process continued to be impeded by the external debt burden. The channelling of resources to debt servicing greatly undermined the efforts to provide basic social services. While SADC welcomed current international efforts to address the debt problem, such as the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC), it believed that more could be done, not only to alleviate the debt burden but to cancel the debt once and for all.

15. The 1998/1999 agricultural season had been characterized by sporadic rainfall owing to the El Niño phenomenon. The well-being of the region's people, particularly poor rural women, had been further undermined. Food security and a safe water supply in the more arid countries of the region could not be fully ensured.

16. In the area of peace and security, the region continued to experience serious setbacks caused by conflicts in Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The problem of refugees and internally displaced persons posed a particular challenge to the Community. The plight of women and children was compounded by sexual and other abuses perpetrated against them in a chaotic and lawless environment. Despite financial and physical constraints, SADC member States were doing their utmost to provide assistance to refugees and displaced persons, and they called upon the international community to support their efforts.

17. SADC was committed to providing education for all in as short a time as possible. Primary school enrolment had increased substantially since 1995. Particular importance was attached to bridging the gap between boys' and girls' enrolment.

18. If SADC was to transform itself into an industrial and information-led region, attention should be paid to vocational training and literacy campaigns, particularly those aimed at women and youth. The Community noted with satisfaction the progress made by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) towards the goal of education for all by the year 2000 (A/54/128). They also looked forward to the World Youth Forum to be held in Senegal in 2000.

19. While the lack of basic health care and nutrition were the most pressing problems facing the elderly, an additional burden of caring for orphaned grandchildren increasingly affected elderly women in the SADC region. The Community was eager to benefit from the experience and best practices of other countries in that area.

20. The HIV/AIDS pandemic continued to take a toll on the region, with serious implications for all sectors of the economy. The advances achieved, particularly in the health sector, would be reversed if the epidemic was not checked. The burden on national budgets was unsustainable. Youth, women and girls were disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS.

21. A protocol on health had been signed at the recent SADC summit held at Maputo, Mozambique, outlining regional health strategies with an emphasis on HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, a high-level conference on HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases in Africa had been held at Lusaka, Zambia, in September. The SADC countries appealed for the support of the international community in addressing those urgent problems.

22. **Mr. Aarset** (Norway), speaking as a youth representative, urged Member States to implement the Youth Action Plan adopted at the third session of the World Youth Forum of the United Nations system, held at Braga, Portugal, in 1998. While the offer of the Government of Senegal to host the next session of the World Youth Forum outside Europe was welcome, the Braga Youth Action Plan should be implemented further before the fourth session was held. To hold it in 2000 would not give youth organizations sufficient time to prepare. Accordingly, Norwegian youth organizations believed that the fourth session should take place in 2001.

23. The World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, held at Lisbon in 1998, had called for the strengthening of the Youth Unit of the Secretariat. Without the necessary resources, the Youth Unit would not be able to promote the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, as envisioned by Member States.

24. His Government had included youth representatives in its delegation to the General Assembly for almost 30 years, and it recommended that all Member States do the same. Youth interests in the United Nations system could be fully represented only by young people themselves.

25. A United Nations report on young people's influence on and representation in society, especially in political decision-making, would be very useful. That should be the theme of a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) human development report.

26. Many of the world's poor countries spent more on debt repayment than on education, health care and basic services combined. Unsustainable debt should be cancelled; the international debt-relief mechanisms should be strengthened and improved; and debtor and creditor countries should work together to find flexible solutions.

27. In a world of increasing globalization, new threats to human rights, as well as new opportunities for the implementation of human-rights instruments, were emerging. The increased openness of Governments and the private sector in many countries gave youth and consumers an opportunity to advance human rights and democracy. In his country, for example, some companies placed a higher priority on ethical standards in investing in and trading with other countries because they had found that ethical behaviour was advantageous to all in the long run.

28. Non-governmental organizations formed the basis of civil society in every country. They were important channels for democracy and vehicles for freedom of expression. Young people had often been at the forefront of the fight for tolerance and human rights and against racism and xenophobia. The involvement of young people and their organizations in the preparations for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, was of great importance for the attainment of its goals.

29. **Mr. Kallehauge** (Denmark) said that the second monitoring period for the implementation of the United Nations Standard Rules for Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities would end in August 2000. The mandate of the Special Rapporteur on disability of the Commission for Social Development was expiring. It was time to evaluate what had been achieved and to consider new initiatives. A third monitoring period might not be the best option.

30. Government funding had been weaker during the second period, and innovation was needed. The Commission for Social Development should mainstream the disability dimension into its work by implementing the United Nations Standard Rules.

31. At the regional level, good results had been achieved through the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993-2002) under the auspices of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Recently, a group of African countries had recommended the launching of an African decade for the period 2000-2010. The great advantage of regional initiatives was that they allowed plans of action to be targeted to the specific needs of countries in the region.

32. Regional plans with a lifespan of a decade or less should be supported by United Nations inter-agency meetings to be held once a year in all regions. Such meetings should be arranged by the respective United Nations regional office in close cooperation with the regional development bank. The meetings should be attended by regional and national non-governmental organizations and by disabled persons. If representatives from donor countries participated as well, such annual conferences would no doubt be instrumental in promoting equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.

33. **Ms. Mariegaard** (Denmark), speaking as a youth representative, said that sustainable development required the active involvement of young people in decision-making and in the design and implementation of programmes. Many youth organizations were ready to contribute their experiences and ideas through pilot projects in cooperation with Governments and international development agencies.

34. In order to involve young people in development, their rights must be guaranteed, including the right to make their own choices regarding education and employment and to determine freely when to have children. Currently, however, only a few young people enjoyed substantial freedom in making choices crucial to their lives.

35. More knowledge was needed about youth, their perceptions and their hopes for the future. Such knowledge was also necessary if Governments and international organizations were to further the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

36. Her Government and the Danish Youth Council therefore encouraged UNDP to give special attention to youth in its annual *Human Development Report* and to consider making youth the theme of a future human development report, for instance, in 2001, when the conference to follow up the World Summit for Children would be held.

37. **Mrs. Wahid** (Bangladesh) said that her country's National Committee on Ageing had made comprehensive recommendations for ensuring that older persons could lead dignified and fruitful lives. The Government had introduced an old-age allowance, undertaken a project to provide social security to distressed and older persons and built shelters for older persons who lacked family or community support. It had also finalized its national plan for older persons, which would address issues relating to physical and psychological well-being, economic advancement and involvement in cultural activities.

38. Bangladesh had welcomed the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. Young people made up one third of Bangladesh's population. The Government was updating its national youth policy to make it more relevant to the current and future needs of youth in Bangladesh. The policy focused on measures to ensure grass-roots participation in youth programmes, the full integration of young people into national development and the implementation of a self-employment programme with microcredit facilities. Other programmes were being implemented to offer leadership training to young people, especially in rural areas; to provide education and health services; and to prevent drug abuse.

39. Bangladesh had adopted a national policy for disabled persons and a plan for its implementation. It would work closely with non-governmental organizations in providing education, training, economic opportunities and rehabilitation programmes for the disabled.

40. **Ms. Nishitateno** (Japan) said that 1999 had been a year of great significance for social development, marked not only by further initiatives to implement the Copenhagen Declaration, but by the observance of the International Year of Older Persons, which had raised global awareness on ageing. Its great impact on the attitudes of the international community was evident in the plenary meetings of the General Assembly devoted to the topic. Many delegations had emphasized the importance of enabling older persons to live their lives in security and dignity, of maintaining a positive perspective on ageing and of devoting attention to the issue of ageing in developing countries and to needs of older women in particular. Her delegation shared those concerns. Observance of the International Year of Older Persons had strengthened the foundation for international efforts in the coming millennium. Her delegation was particularly pleased by the formation of a global network of non-governmental organizations. The Government of Japan would continue to collaborate with other Member States on a long-term strategy on ageing and a review of the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

41. With regard to the issue of persons with disabilities, her delegation stressed the importance of policies aimed at providing the disabled with accessibility, social services and social safety nets, and employment and sustainable livelihoods. Recent developments in information and telecommunications technology had increased the access of persons with disabilities to information in all areas and hence facilitated their participation in social activities. As part of its efforts to build a society free of information barriers, the Government of Japan in 1998 had established guidelines on accessibility of telecommunications equipment for persons with disabilities. It was also promoting research and development for such systems, such as a graphical user interface which facilitated access to multimedia information. In projects in developing countries intended to provide equal opportunity to persons with disabilities, Japan stressed capacity-building. Her delegation hoped that international cooperation in the field could be further enhanced through, for example, the efforts of the United Nations Voluntary Fund on Disability.

42. As the international community redoubled its efforts to enhance the momentum generated thus far, it should take the human-centred approach reflected in the Copenhagen Declaration as a fundamental principle.

43. **Mr. Ka** (Senegal) said that his delegation wished to express its appreciation for the high quality of the Secretary-General's reports on the topics covered by the agenda item. Although significant progress had been made towards the goals described in the reports, many obstacles remained and had been magnified by recent financial and humanitarian crises and the challenges of globalization currently facing developing countries.

44. The Secretary-General's report on cooperatives (A/54/57) underscored the diversity of the laws governing cooperatives and the major changes they were undergoing. In Senegal, the positive role of cooperatives in achieving the Government's economic and social objectives was recognized, and the law provided for their independence and autonomy, whether rural or farm cooperatives, mutual societies, production associations or housing cooperatives. His delegation urged the need for Member States to arrive

at agreed general guidelines that would create an environment favourable to the development of cooperatives. To that end, they should exchange information and experience and encourage an international partnership among cooperatives.

45. Follow-up to the International Year of the Family had not so far been as successful as hoped, owing to a lack of consensus on terminology and basic definitions and the absence of a global plan of action and indicators by which to measure progress. Substantive progress had been hampered by economic difficulties, the employment crisis, limited social investment and lack of access to basic social services. To meet the challenge, the resources of the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities should be increased. Senegal had had a family code for several decades and attached high priority to issues of parenting and promoting a partnership between men and women within the family.

46. Senegal was to have the honour of hosting the World Education Forum in April 2000, the culmination point of the Education for All (EFA) 2000 Assessment, which would review the education situation around the globe and devise new initiatives to realize the objectives of the World Declaration adopted at the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990). Among them, the reduction in levels of illiteracy, particularly among women and young people, should be accorded highest priority. Despite budget constraints, the Government of Senegal had made outstanding efforts in the area of education and training; more than a third of the national budget was allocated to education. The national human resource development programme introduced in 1995 with support from the World Bank had expanded access to elementary education and improved the quality of the education provided. Special emphasis had been placed on reducing inequalities between urban and rural areas, containing education costs and increasing the enrolment of girls. His delegation supported the declaration of a decade for eradicating illiteracy in Africa, including illiteracy among older persons.

47. The principles and recommendations emerging from the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth held in Lisbon and the World Youth Forum held in Braga, Portugal — the right of youth to education and training, to health and employment and to participation in social and political life, and the need to address the problems that most affected them, such as unemployment, illiteracy, poverty, drug use and juvenile delinquency — were at the heart of national youth policy in Senegal. In collaboration and cooperation with the National Youth Council, the Government was in the process of implementing its national youth programme of action and mainstreaming the youth dimension into all development projects and programmes. Moreover, it was sparing no effort to make the fourth session of the World Youth Forum of the United Nations System, to be held in Senegal in the year 2000, an outstanding success. He invited the youth of the world to attend. His delegation would also advocate strengthening the Youth Unit of the United Nations Secretariat and holding a second World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth under United Nations auspices.

48. **Ms. Arystanbekova** (Kazakhstan) said that, since the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, the commitments undertaken by the Member States had been transformed into concrete initiatives in the areas of poverty eradication, productive employment and social integration. At the special session of the General Assembly to be held in 2000 to review implementation of the outcome of the Summit, priority should be given to key social issues, such as family, health, safety and poverty. Of equal importance in achieving the Copenhagen objectives was an emphasis on education. The Education for All (EFA) 2000 Assessment should focus on planning future policy initiatives to address the challenges related to early childhood education, primary education, literacy and better living. Her delegation looked forward to the World Education Forum to be held in Senegal in April 2000 as the culmination point of the EFA 2000 Assessment and a means of promoting life-long learning for all people.

49. On the threshold of the next century, young people had a vital role to play in decision-making. In the light of the detailed information contained in the Secretary-General's report on implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (A/54/59), her delegation strongly believed in the importance of joint efforts to draw up new guidelines and strengthen cooperation between Governments and other actors.

50. It was regrettable that the most vulnerable groups — the unemployed, the disabled, the elderly, children and women — suffered most from the recent international economic crisis. The Government of Kazakhstan saw it as one of its main tasks to create a broad and reliable system of social protection aimed at raising the standard of living. It had taken measures to stimulate self-employment by providing credit and organizing workshops on establishing small and medium-size enterprises, in association with United Nations agencies. The President's programme, "Kazakhstan — 2030", identified social harmony, political stability and economic development as the country's key

goals. Her delegation fully supported United Nations efforts to focus more closely on social issues.

51. **Mr. Amorós Núñez** (Cuba) said that his country accorded special importance to the various aspects of social development considered under item 106. In Cuba, equitable distribution of the wealth of society made it possible to meet the basic needs of health, education, employment and cultural development to a degree not often possible in developing countries.

52. The integrated development of youth was an issue of special interest in Cuba. There was no sphere of economic, political or social life in Cuba in which young people did not play a major role. Providing youth with opportunities to participate fully in society was a guiding principle of government policy; youth were well represented, for example, in Parliament and in the executive branch. Cuba had been applying the Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond on the national level and collaborating in international efforts.

53. In Cuba, a satisfying old age was considered not only a legitimate aspiration of any human being, but an indicator of development and good health. Like the rest of the population, older persons benefited from universal free medical and hospital care and social security, one of the chief reasons for the increase in life expectancy in Cuba to age 75. Other programmes, specifically designed to provide social services to older adults or the elderly living alone or to promote voluntary associations of older persons, further improved health and social service indicators for the older age group. Among the activities conducted in honour of the International Year of Older Persons, of great interest was the recent event, GERONTOVIDA 99, held in Havana, combining the third Latin American Congress of the International Association of Gerontology and the Ibero-American Meeting of Older Persons.

54. With regard to persons with disabilities, the Government zealously applied policies that included support to organizations of the disabled and initiatives in the areas of health, education, employment, sports and artistic and cultural activities. Special education programmes ensured a school enrolment of 85 per cent of persons with disabilities, and integrated rehabilitation programmes had succeeded in returning thousands of disabled persons to work.

55. The experience of Cuba demonstrated that social development was achievable even when obstacles were placed to major economic development, such as the economic blockade against Cuba promoted by the United States of America. It was to be hoped that the current debate in plenary meeting on the World Summit for Social Development would reaffirm the need to address the increasing poverty and unemployment, deteriorating health, growing malnutrition and declining education levels in many countries. The answers lay in more official development assistance, fulfilment by the developed nations of their aid promises, inclusion of a social dimension in economic adjustment policies and the generation of an international environment favourable to social development.

56. **Mr. De Groot** (Netherlands), speaking as the youth representative selected by the Dutch Youth Council for International Affairs, said that he would like to talk about how the Internet could contribute to social development and youth empowerment. Young people made up half of the on-line community, though they accounted for less than a quarter of the world's population, because they were immersed in a process of learning and personal development. The Internet provided an opportunity for young people to invent and execute new projects, to form a non-governmental organization, for instance, or start up a small enterprise. An example of such a project was the UNderDOG project set up by the Council, which enabled youth to discuss United Nations issues on-line.

57. Despite the opportunities it offered, the Internet had at least two shortcomings that demanded urgent attention. The first involved the degree of access and related to the information gap between the developed and developing countries. The second involved quality of access and related to the difficulty of finding the information desired in the Internet "cybersprawl", which was suggestive of a poorly planned metropolis. Young people themselves bore primary responsibility for addressing the problem of cybersprawl, but it was the duty of local authorities, Governments and the international community to enable young people to realize their potential for change.

58. The Internet should not be developed by market forces alone. The Youth Unit of the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNESCO should cooperate with youth organizations in taking action. First, young people should be trained, formally and informally, to handle digital information properly. Second, the problem of language should be addressed; most Internet information was in English, and translation initiatives were needed to make it available in other languages. In those efforts, young people should be involved not only as objects but also as subjects of actions that affected them. For example, the World Youth Forum of the United Nations System and its outcome should be taken more seriously. Its proceedings could be improved by a training programme for

non-governmental youth organizations, with the help of the Youth Unit, on using the Internet to maximize their efforts.

59. **Ms. Elisha** (Benin) said that Benin was committed to establishing institutional mechanisms and mobilizing the political will and resources necessary to combat underdevelopment. Special efforts were being made to address the problems of young people, older persons and disabled persons.

60. In African society, those groups had traditionally enjoyed the love and support of families, of which they had been an integral part. As African countries sought to build modern nation States, the economic foundations of the family were being continuously eroded. With agriculture oriented towards meeting the needs of the international market, farmers were unable to generate sufficient income and lacked the time to grow food products for their own consumption. Young people were abandoning their villages and swelling the ranks of the urban poor. The decline of official development assistance had reduced the State's capacity to provide education for young people, too many of whom were forced to enter the labour market prematurely. Poverty and unemployment were preventing many Africans from caring for their families, and only the increase of purchasing power in both urban and rural areas would reverse that situation.

61. In order to address the problems of the most vulnerable groups in society, her Government had established a Ministry for Social Protection and the Family with a service specifically responsible for meeting the needs of older persons, who represented only 7 per cent of the population, reflecting their low life expectancy. Other initiatives included the establishment of care facilities, the provision of assistance to older persons living in poverty, the promotion of solidarity among the generations, the adoption of legislation to protect older persons, the strengthening of their capacity to meet their own needs, and the implementation of measures to combat isolation among the elderly, including the creation of day centres.

62. Since the proclamation of the International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981, a number of steps had been taken to enhance the socio-economic position of disabled persons in Benin, including the establishment of training centres, support for associations of disabled persons, the adoption of legislation, the dissemination of rules on equal opportunities for disabled persons, training for speech therapists, and the signing and ratification of the agreement establishing the African Rehabilitation Institute. Those many valuable initiatives would yield results only in a favourable economic environment, in which sustained growth increased purchasing power, enabling families to care for all their members, young, old or disabled.

63. **Mr. Desai** (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) said that, during the global economic crisis of the past two years, growth had fallen dramatically, especially in developing countries. The number of countries with negative per capita growth had doubled, while the proportion of the population living in countries so affected had increased sevenfold. A disproportionate share of the cost of the crisis had thus been borne by the poorest countries and the poorest people. The international community must in future address the issues of integration and interdependence with a view to securing not only stability, but also equitable and sustainable economic growth.

64. The quality of growth was also important. The international community had made a commitment to halve the number of people living in absolute poverty, with incomes of less than $1 per day, by 2015. Studies had shown that, with growth rates at their past levels of 3 to 4 per cent, that goal could not be achieved. However, if growth strategies incorporated the concepts of equity and social justice, that goal could be achieved before 2015.

65. Poverty was linked to unemployment. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that at least 140 million persons worldwide were unemployed. Some groups were exceptionally disadvantaged. A large proportion of poor households were headed by women, while young people aged 15 to 24 represented almost half of the unemployed globally. The problem of poverty among older persons was especially alarming, since the proportion of the population aged over 60 was rising sharply. In developed countries, older persons remained active for longer but were unable to find work, while in developing countries they had to work too hard for too long because of the absence of social security. The international community could not address the issue of the growing number of older persons without considering their entitlement to income, employment and social protection. Disabled persons, too, accounted for a disproportionately high number of the unemployed and those living in poverty, especially in developing countries.

66. The plight of those underprivileged minorities must be addressed through a social philosophy promoting inclusiveness, equity and justice. At the national level, the concerns of those groups must be integrated into every area of policy, instead of being addressed in a compartmentalized fashion through special programmes administered by ministries of welfare. In order to remedy unemployment, national growth strategies must emphasize labour-intensive sectors such as agriculture and textiles, while the

international community must ensure that the commitment to eradicate poverty was reflected, *inter alia*, in trade policies that increased access for producers from developing countries to global markets and financial policies that emphasized micro-credit.

67. The Third Committee played a strong role in promoting the themes of gender equality, equity and social justice in the work of the United Nations, and its concerns were very close to those of his Department. He urged it to focus on those themes not as the province of special programmes for special groups, but as priorities that must be central to all development strategies.

68. **Mr. Mofokeng** (South Africa) asked whether the United Nations funds and programmes had tailored their priorities to the needs of the world's 60 million unemployed young people, and whether there were any plans to strengthen the United Nations Youth Unit, which was severely understaffed. He expressed concern that the follow-up to the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth (Lisbon, 1998) was not receiving the same attention within the Secretariat as the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and asked whether the Conference had not been disadvantaged in that respect by the decision not to designate it a United Nations conference.

69. **Mr. Desai** (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) replied that, while his Department recognized that more needed to be done to assist the world's youth and was seeking to raise awareness of that problem, it was not a field-oriented body and lacked the budget to deliver services at the country level. That was the responsibility of such institutions as UNDP and UNICEF. Youth unemployment was a social time bomb that must be defused. ILO was undertaking a number of initiatives to that end, but much remained to be done. As to the Lisbon Conference, the General Assembly had decided on a format that would, in its view, be most conducive to interaction between Governments and youth groups. His Department took the outcome of the Conference very seriously and was working to disseminate it.

70. **Mr. Kalache** (World Health Organization (WHO)) said that the International Year of Older Persons had given WHO the impetus to consolidate its Ageing and Health Programme established in 1995. The Programme's title reflected a shift from earlier compartmentalized initiatives that had focused on the elderly to a new approach emphasizing ageing, rather than old age, and based on the idea that, since life was a continuum, the best way to ensure health in older age was to highlight the ageing dimension throughout the life cycle. The Programme's five key elements, namely health promotion, gender, cultural perspective, community and ethics, reflected the reality that women and men aged differently, the importance of understanding the settings in which individuals aged, the need to find affordable solutions for older persons within their communities, and the ethical dilemmas related to ageing, including such issues as undue prolongation of life or undue hastening of death.

71. The Programme's conceptual framework was based on the idea of functional capacity. The functional capacity of human biological systems reached its peak in early adulthood and declined naturally thereafter. The rate of that decline was largely determined by lifestyle, environment and such deficiencies as poor nutrition. Much could be done to slow the rate of decline, and, for individuals who had reached the threshold of disability, hip replacements, cataract operations and other such interventions could restore function. Where the regaining of functional capacity was no longer possible, maximum quality of life should be ensured within the limitations imposed by the level of disability.

72. Drawing on the Programme, WHO had developed a Global Strategy for Active Ageing consisting of four components, namely gathering and disseminating information on healthy ageing to target groups ranging from policy makers to ageing individuals; raising awareness of population ageing as one of the greatest public health challenges of the twenty-first century; capacity-building, including identifying research needs and training for primary health-care workers; and policy development with particular emphasis on multi-sectoral approaches and cost-effective strategies for developing countries.

73. The work of WHO on ageing and health was carried out in partnership with other United Nations agencies, government agencies, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions. The 1999 World Health Day had been dedicated to the theme of healthy ageing. On 2 October 1999, WHO had launched the Global Movement for Active Ageing by organizing the Global Embrace, a series of walk events in which millions of people in over 3,000 cities and towns in 97 countries had participated over a 24-hour period. The Global Embrace had been the largest-ever simultaneous health-promotion event in the world. The momentum generated by the WHO initiatives to celebrate the International Year of Older Persons would be consolidated through, *inter alia*, the establishment of a programme for research on ageing and health and an initiative to expand programmes to train health professionals in caring for older persons.

74. Efforts to promote active ageing must be complemented by policies to reduce social inequities and poverty, and should be integrated into all development programmes. The maintenance of health and quality of life for all ages would help to build a harmonious intergenerational community and a dynamic economy. Healthy older persons were a resource to their families, their communities and their societies as a whole.

75. **Mr. Doryan** (World Bank) said that the widespread visibility of recent economic reversals and social setbacks had highlighted the human costs of financial crises in emerging markets and had shown that the global community had not fully understood the meaning and measure of development. It had become clear that separating macroeconomic policy-making from human development was a recipe for failure. Women and girls were particularly vulnerable to the effects of financial crises, since they often bore the burden of food and medical shortages by putting their families' needs before their own, and were the first to lose jobs and educational opportunities. One of the most disruptive aspects of the financial crises had been the unravelling of the promise of a better future for young people and their families. The crises had strained the capacity of the affected Governments to prevent basic social services from collapsing and had illustrated the importance of effective governance in key social areas and public confidence in government officials.

76. The World Bank had conducted a series of studies entitled "Consultations with the Poor", involving approximately 20,000 poor men and women in 23 countries. Five main dimensions of concern to poor people had emerged from those studies: material well-being, physical well-being, security, freedom of choice and action, and good social relations. The concept of well-being included the ability to acquire education, information, services and resources, to enjoy a decent standard of living, to avoid slipping further into poverty and even to help others in need.

77. The Bank sought to address the problems of human and social development through various approaches, such as the creation of "coalitions for change" involving cooperation among the United Nations, Governments, multilateral organizations, the private sector and civil society. It had launched a new poverty strategy under which a poverty reduction strategy paper interlinking macroeconomic and social issues would be prepared for each country to guide the efforts of the Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Government concerned. The Bank had deepened and broadened its commitment to debt reduction through a revitalized Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative. Recently, it had produced a paper on managing the social dimensions of crisis, in which it had pointed out the need to minimize the impact of crises on the poor. On the basis of that paper, a new work programme would be developed to identify good practices in that area. The Bank was strongly committed to investing in human development, which was the foundation for long-term economic growth and poverty reduction. Accordingly, it had earmarked over $7 billion for lending in the areas of social protection, health, nutrition and education.

78. The Bank's broad social agenda was basic to its overall mission of poverty reduction. The Bank and similar institutions must bear in mind their accountability to those living in poverty and exclusion, particularly in view of the forthcoming five-year review of the World Summit for Social Development. It was time for the global community to listen carefully to the voices of the poor and respond with renewed commitment, deeper understanding and more effective partnerships.

79. **Ms. Olszowska** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that the Education for All (EFA) 2000 Assessment exercise, described in document A/54/128, would provide an opportunity for each country to take stock of its progress and shortfalls, consult with neighbouring countries and donors and reshape its educational strategies at the threshold of the new millennium. Greater emphasis was currently being placed on the presentation of disaggregated data to facilitate in-country and regional educational planning. A list of 18 core EFA indicators and other, more qualitative means of reviewing EFA progress had been developed. Undoubtedly, there would be a huge demand for international agencies to assist countries in collecting, processing and interpreting quantitative data. It was important to stress that each indicator must be interpreted in relation to others, rather than in isolated fashion. The EFA 2000 Assessment would also involve reporting on the status of implementation of Commitment 6 of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, in terms of universal and equitable access to quality education.

80. Although some 3.3 billion people had become literate in the past four decades, progress had been uneven and there were still some 875 million illiterate people in the world, two thirds of whom were women; the illiteracy gap between men and women had not narrowed. Consequently, a 10-year programme on girls' education, based on the premise that national partners must take the lead, was about to be submitted to the Secretary-General. The proposed United Nations decade to eradicate illiteracy was aimed at creating a literate world in which societies and individuals promoted

their own literacy projects. UNESCO would welcome the adoption of a General Assembly resolution on the subject.

81. Before the end of 1999, UNESCO would organize an international meeting on youth and older persons, in the framework of the International Year of Older Persons. The Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes and the Braga Youth Action Plan had inspired the UNESCO strategy for action with and for youth. The next conference of ministers responsible for youth affairs should be held at the same time as the next non-governmental organizations' forum in order to enhance the dialogue among youth, the United Nations system and decision-makers. She hoped that Member States would make efforts in that direction.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.